

Politics & Film

Government 432

Georgetown University

Summer 2021

Professor R. Boyd

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Course Description:

This course explores foundational questions of life in a political community through a discussion of classic 20th century films. We will be mainly concerned with the role of ethics in politics, especially what these films can tell us about dilemmas of leadership, citizenship, the requirements of civil order, political obligation, justice, humanitarian duties, pluralism, and the good life—that is, some of the classic themes of political philosophy. We will also use these films to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of leading political ideologies such as liberalism, nationalism, fascism, communism, capitalism, and cosmopolitanism. The final section of the course will explore issues of race, gender, and cultural identity in the contemporary US and a globalizing world order.

Our way of proceeding will be to pair each film with short excerpts from classic works of social and political thought that will help identify and illuminate key themes. Students are expected to do the accompanying readings in advance of our screenings (+/- 75 pages a week), submit a weekly critical essay (2-3 pages, double-spaced) in response to assigned prompts, and participate actively in the class discussions.

Important: please note that some of the movies we will be watching this summer include graphic violence, highly offensive language, and themes of sexuality, gender, race, identity, and cross-cultural conflict that some people may find disturbing to view, let alone to discuss in class. If you are in doubt, or anticipate that any of this material may be triggering, then please take this into consideration before registering for the course. Scripts for most of the films we will be viewing are available online through multiple search portals. If you have any concerns whatsoever please discuss them with the Professor in advance of registration or screening, and we will try whenever possible to make reasonable accommodations.

Required Texts, available for purchase in inexpensive paperback editions at the Georgetown University Bookstore

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago)

* **Additional Short Documents and Excerpts,** uploaded and accessible via Blackboard/ Canvas

Course Schedule

June 7: Introduction, overview of course format, policies, etc.

Section I: Politics and Ethics

June 8 and 9: *The Godfather* (1972)
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 18.

June 10 and 14: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)
*Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 13-18.

June 15 and 16: *Battle of Algiers* (1966)
*Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence"

Section II: War, Totalitarianism, and Citizenship

June 17 and 21: *Triumph of the Will* (1935)
*Frankfurt School, *Authoritarian Personality*, selections.

June 22 and 23: *Casablanca* (1942)
*Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Ch. 5
*Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, selections.

June 24 and 28: *Schindler's List* (1993)
*Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, selections.

Section III: Capitalism, Communism and the Cold War Order

June 29 and 30: *Modern Times* (1936)
*Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, selections
*Antonio Gramsci, "Fordism and Taylorism"

July 1 and 5: *Wall Street* (1987)
*Milton Friedman, "Social Responsibility of Business"

Section IV: Race, Identity, and Cosmopolitanism

July 6 and 7: *Bamboozled* (2000)
*Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, "The Racial Preference Licensing Act"
*Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," March 18, 2008 speech on race.

July 8: *The Home and the World* (1984)
*Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism"

Course Requirements:

There are two formal course requirements for Gov 432, Politics & Film:

- 1) Each weekend you will receive through Canvas a list of 5-6 “Study Questions.” These are intended to do three things. First, these questions should prompt you to think about how the required readings for each session relate to the films we’ll be screening in class. In some cases, the connections between the readings and the films should be obvious; in other cases, the levels of interconnection may require some reflection on your part. It’s my hope that the study questions will give us common things to be watching for as we view the movies. Second, these questions will prompt and guide (though not exhaust, I hope!) our in-class discussions of the films, which we’ll undertake roughly every other class. Finally, and most importantly, **each week you should choose one of the prompts from the study questions and respond with a short (2-3 double-spaced pages) paper in response to that prompt.** These papers may of course draw upon our in-class conversations. But they should also involve original analysis, thinking, and criticism on your part, moving beyond the examples and arguments from class. They’ll be graded based on their originality, clarity of thought and expression, and success in shedding light on the themes featured in the movies.

There will be five sets of prompts (one for each full week of the summer course), and you must submit a short paper each week in response to a prompt of your choice from that week. Each of these five papers will be due on Sunday of the following weekend at 11:59PM (For example, you get the Study Questions on Sunday, June 6th, and the paper for that week is due the following Sunday, June 13 at 11:59PM).

Of these five required papers, the highest four grades make up 80% of your final grade.

- 2) Prepared attendance and class participation—20%. As noted above, most of the time we’ll screen a film in one class session and then discuss that film and accompanying readings the next day. You are expected to have done the accompanying readings in order to be prepared to answer the relevant prompts and to talk about the films.

Attendance in the Summer Session is especially important given the accelerated pace at which we’ll be moving. Missing even a few days can put you behind and be difficult if not impossible to make up. If you know that you will have to miss more than 3 classes during the Summer Session, you should not register for this course. Any classes you miss (including the films we screen on those days) will be entirely your responsibility to make up.

Final Grade Calculation:

Highest 4 papers @ 20% each=80 points
Attendance & Participation @20%=20 points
=Maximum of 100 points

GRADING SCALE FOR GOV 432

A=100-93

A-=92.99-90

B+=89.99-87

B=86.99-83

B-=82.99-80

C+=79.99-77

C=76.99-73

C-=72.99-70

Cut-offs are absolute and I do not round grades up.